

**Minutes of the Community Development Committee
Public Hearing & Public Meeting
September 28, 2010
First Floor Meeting Room & Town Room, Town Hall**

Attendance:

Present: Members: Claude Tellier (CT), Mary Jane Laus (MJL), Jana McClure (JM), Nancy Gregg (NG), Staff Nate Malloy, (NM), Staff Dave Ziomek (DZ), Roy Rosenblatt (RR) consultant

Guests: 15 guests—See attached sign-in sheet

Call to Order

5:42 p.m.

Announcements

None

Minutes

None

Community Development Public Hearing

Town staff opened the public hearing by explaining that the Community Development Committee will hear from the public regarding the Community Development Strategy and general town-wide principles; it is not the forum to discuss project-specific recommendations. The following are the public comments:

Reikka Simula, Chair of Committee on Homelessness: On behalf of committee and homeless in Amherst, Ms. Simula spoke to the need for more social and capital plans to help homeless individuals. She is aware of approximately 50 homeless individuals in the community who would benefit from this investment.

Stanley Maron: Amherst needs a warming place—a decent place for the homeless to seek shelter, warmth and services. Portland, Maine, for instance, runs a full-service shelter with mental health services.

Angel: Recognized the need for education and outreach, especially for homeless individuals and low income residents, because the homeless population will grow if people are not educated and cannot find help.

Sundarii McGrigg: Ms. McGrigg spoke to the importance of education and literacy, emphasizing programs that help subsidize school and childcare for young mothers who would otherwise miss the opportunity to graduate from high school or college.

Sheila Murphy, The Literacy Project: Identified need for increased support services for adults and families who need access to social services and help finding post-secondary education opportunities as well as job opportunities.

Kim Hake, The Literacy Project: As an educator, Ms. Hake explained that the GED program has almost a 100% success rate.

Ellie Manire-Gatti, Committee on Homelessness: The committee identified establishing enhanced SRO's by 2012 is a high priority for the community, which should be reflected in the Community Development Strategy. The committee also voted to recognize the housing and social service needs of the homeless as a top community priority.

Laura Quinn, Committee on Homelessness: Since human services budget eliminated from Town budget in 2009, CDBG is the only source of funds for many organizations. Town needs to examine short-term needs and long term solutions—in the short term, bundle human services in a single location or umbrella organization while the long term would include capital project planning by leveraging CDBG and other funds.

Julie Federman, Health Director: Emphasized that mental health is an often overlooked cause of homelessness, hoarding and other symptoms that jeopardize the health, safety and sanitation of citizens in Amherst. Many residents who need mental health treatment are at risk of losing housing; the Amherst Health Department could help provide holistic treatment.

Connie Kruger: Commented that the Community Development Strategy was a bit confusing in its organization and presentation of priorities—difficult to discern the Master Plan goals from the community development strategies. Also commented that the list of priorities should be reexamined for relative importance.

Hwei-Ling Greeney, Committee on Homelessness: The Community Development Strategy does not integrate and synthesize the various planning documents very well with community development; the CDS needs to connect the Master Plan with the needs of the community. Would like to see the list of priorities refined because many items are redundant, and categorized—for example, social and non-social.

Hwei-Ling: Would also like to see clear organization of goals and strategies that have been accomplished, are in progress, and are planned for the near future. Noted that preventing homelessness is just as important as serving those who are homeless.

Guilford Mooring; Superintendent of Public Works: The Town needs to improve its infrastructure connecting village center with housing projects, especially since many of the streets lack bike lanes, pull-off bus stops, and accessible sidewalks. There is a need to integrate housing with transportation and public infrastructure to help people get to their destinations.

Andrew Melnichek: Noted that there are not Select Board members present at this important public hearing. Reiterated Mr. Guilford's comments that public transportation and pedestrian routes need improvements to help citizens travel in town.

Cheryl Zoll, Director of Amherst Survival Center: Would like the strategy and priorities to be broad and inclusive of all community needs.

Stanley Maron: Encouraged Community Development Committee to visit shelters in other communities to learn what components are necessary to run a successful shelter—shower facilities, warm food, places to sleep, etc.

Sundarii McGrigg: Reiterated need for mental health services to help those at risk of eviction, in particular, the elderly who may have limited resources if lose their housing. Spoke to the need for outreach and advocacy for young mothers and others who are not aware of the resources and human services available in Amherst. Noted that the schools would benefit from in-house social services to reach out to teenage mothers and other at risk youths.

Andrew Melnichek: questioned various priorities in the Community Development Strategy—
#11: what does strengthening partnerships with colleges and university actually mean? Would Amherst College donate land for a homeless shelter?

#14: Vague—what are other taxes and are the current businesses not adequate?

#15: How would Town streamline permit process?

#22: There is a need for trails to help kids get to school but not a need to expand the general trail network. Also need for outdoor recreational facilities for schools and the low- and moderate-income.

Diane Regnery, Literacy Project: Ms. Regnery spoke to the need for more education and outreach, calling attention to stories where residents who had lived in Amherst for years were not aware of services that could help them with transitional assistance, job placement, etc.

Bob Greeney: Social services are mentioned within the Community Development Strategy, and would appear to be a high priority for the town. However, in the list of priorities, there is not specific language addressing social service issues and only two priorities (#6 and #11) that reference social services.

Bob Greeney: Noted that there are three vacancies on the Community Development Committee and was surprised that there were not any members from the Select Board at the hearing.

Hwei-Ling Greeney: Town needs mobile advocacy to go to apartment complexes and housing locations of individuals and families who have difficulty finding those places in the community—need to link services with tenants with an outreach worker that is ‘on the ground’. This model of mobile advocacy would also be useful in the schools.

Ellie Manire-Gatti: Although Amherst has preserved a significant amount of open space; there is still a need to protect land for habitat and to preserve quality of (drinking) water supplies. Environmental education, as provided by the Hitchcock Center is important, but too expensive for many—could this be subsidized?

Hwei-Ling Greeney: Suggested that for next round of CDBG, the Community Development Committee gauge community priorities by using a survey (like the Town of Hudson) sent to boards and committees or another technique that does not require the poor and disenfranchised to attend a public hearing—this can be demoralizing and unwelcoming. Ms. Greeney would also like to see a chart in the next CDS showing projects, funds spent, etc.

Sundarii McGrigg: Reiterated need for transitional assistance for families and individuals who are at risk of losing housing or a job—the things in life that provide [financial] stability.

Andrew Melnichek: Reiterated need for improvements to public facilities and transportation, particularly as it relates to low- and moderate-income housing.

CT closed the public hearing at 7:23 p.m.

Old Business

Committee discussed updating its webpage based on public comment to include clarifying statement of CDBG process and role of the Community Development Committee.

New Business

JM noted that the since the Community Development Strategy is a summary of the Master Plan, it would have been beneficial to have citizens and staff who were involved in the process attend the hearing to clarify questions and priorities.

The Committee than began its discussion of social service priorities, reflecting on prior year priorities and opinions heard during the public hearing. The themes distilled from public comments were: preventing homelessness and providing shelter; outreach and advocacy for a range of services, mental health services as a preventive measure; emergency and transitional assistance to help those at risk of losing stability in life. The Committee affirmed these community priorities with a unanimous vote that for the 2011 CDBG application, Amherst's social service priorities include:

1. Homelessness and sheltering
2. Education: outreach and advocacy
3. Mental health services
4. Emergency & preventive services: emergency rental assistance, emergency fuel assistance, emergency food and emergency shelter services that can include case management and coordination

The Committee then discussed target areas and goals for non-social service activities. The Committee agreed by consensus that the target areas are the village centers identified in the recently adopted Master Plan, and that all non-social service activities need to promote sustainable development principles.

Material Distributed at Meeting (Available upon request in the Planning Department)

Agenda

Draft 2011 Community Development Strategy (based on 2010 CDS)

Draft social service application

Draft non-social service application

Adjourned

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20PM

Next Meeting

Public Meeting October 14, 2010 at 11:30 a.m. in the First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall